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Resourceful Central America.

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RESOURCEFUL CENTRAL AMERICA.

By JOHN BARRETT,

DIRECTOR OF THE INTERNATIONAL BUREAU OF THE AMERICAN REPUBLICS.

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RESOURCEFUL CENTRAL AMERICA.

BY JOHN BARRETT.

(Director of the International Bureau of the American Republics.)

THE best way to understand or study any section of this world which may be little known is to locate it on the map clearly and then make comparisons as to its size with sections better known.

Central America is sometimes described as all that portion of the North-American continent lying between the Rio Grande and the Atrato rivers; the former dividing Mexico from the United States and the latter forming practically the boundary line between Panama and Colombia. Politically, however, it comprehends the five independent states of Guatemala, Honduras, Salvador, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica. In the order named, they lie directly south and east of Mexico, between the Caribbean Sea and the Pacific Ocean. Salvador is the only one of the five that borders solely on the Pacific, or that has not shores washed by both waters.

As the average newspaper reader sees the names of these republics mentioned in the dispatches he thinks of them as indefinitely existing somewhere to the distant south of the United States. He believes that they are nearer Mexico than Patagonia, but he hesitates before he goes on record to that effect.

In fact, all these countries, grouped as Central America, are so close at hand that they are within a few days' steaming of New Orleans, Mobile, or Galveston. They are much nearer geographically to our gulf coast than Panama, which, on account of the advertising it has enjoyed from the canal, now seems only a few hours from New York. Panama, as it looks on the map, should belong to Central America,—it certainly is not part of South America. Having formerly been a portion of Colombia, the greater part of which is in South America proper, it naturally has never been classed as belonging to Central or North America.

THE INDEPENDENT STATES OF CENTRAL AMERICA, SHOWING THEIR RESPECTIVE CAPITALS.

APPROACHES TO CENTRAL AMERICA.

A strong influence that has worked to make Central America seem far away has been the necessity, in the past, of reaching the different capitals or principal cities either by sailing from San Francisco on a journey oc-

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THE OLD MODE OF TRANSPORTATION IN NICARAGUA.

cupying from ten days to two weeks down the Pacific Coast past Mexico, or by crossing the Isthmus of Panama and proceeding north. The physical conformation of Central America is such that the high and accessible lands suitable for cities and the better classes of population are much nearer the Pacific Ocean than the Caribbean Sea. The shores and the interior facing on the latter sea are generaliy low, and, until recently, when banana cultivation began to open them to the world, they were a wild, swampy, mosquito jungle.

The few railroads have started from the Pacific Coast and wound their way to the capitals and commercial centers, but now rapid progress is being made toward rail connections with the Caribbean side. Costa Rica is already well provided in this respect, and its beautiful capital of San José is easily reached in a day's ride through impressive scenery from Port Limon. Guatemala hopes to have its railroad to the Gulf of Honduras completed next fall. Nicaragua is planning a line that will connect the Caribbean Sea with its great interior lake, while Honduras has begun a road that is destined to provide an approach on the same side to Tegucigalpa. In a few years it should be possible to cross by rail each Central-American country from sea to sea. An era of continued peace, which ought to be at hand, would see this desired condition of communication soon accomplished.

ONE OF THE OLD MISSION CHURCHES OF NICARAGUA.

COMPARATIVE SIZE OF CENTRAL-AMERICAN STATES.

Very few people have a correct impression of the size of Central America as a whole or of its states, taken separately. California seems like a large State. It extends 770 miles along the Pacific and has an extreme width of 375 miles. If California were laid end for end on Central America it would cover it with the exception of Salvador, which is just the size of New Jersey and occupies a little over 7000 square miles. Stated in another way, if Central America were lifted up bodily and laid down on our Atlantic Coast

A TYPICAL GROUP OF COSTA RICANS.

it would just hide all New England, New York, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey. In short, it has a combined area of approximately 167,000 square miles. Individually, aside from Salvador, already mentioned, the states could be compared as follows: Honduras to Pennsylvania, 45,000 square miles; Guatemala to Mississippi, 47,000; Nicaragua to New York, 49,000; Costa Rica to Vermont and New Hampshire, 18,000.

Data as to the population of these states are somewhat contradictory, but the official figures given to the International Bureau of American Republics by the diplomatic representatives of these countries at Washington are here used. Guatemala heads the list with 1,364,678 people. Then comes Salvador, with 1,006,848; Honduras, with 543,741; Nicaragua, with 423,200, and Costa Rica, with 331,340, —a grand total of 3,671,807. This nearly exceeds that of either Texas or Tennessee, and is about twice that of California. Such a population should disabuse the minds of many persons that Central America is a sparsely settled, savage land. Of course, there are considerable portions of the low lands and along the seacoasts where the inhabitants are few, and even these live in most primitive manner, but on the plateaus and higher sections of the interior are cities and towns of advanced civilization, with up-to-date features of municipal life, and an agricultural population that leaves little valuable land unoccupied.

CONDITIONS OF POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT.

It is a surprise to the man who has not studied Central America to learn that Salvador, with only 7000 square miles, has more than 1,000,000 inhabitants. This indicates a density of population far greater than that of New Hampshire or Vermont, and means that there are not many "deserted farms" for sale in Salvador! Guatemala, with an increasing population that, since the last census, has probably now reached nearly 1,500,000, cannot be regarded as a land of untraversed jungle, for the density of population is greater than that of Louisiana. Honduras has the largest area of unused country, with Nicaragua next, but the development of the banana industry and the demand for valuable timber grown in the low interior sections are destined to make every unknown part accessible and open to exploitation.

Too strong emphasis cannot be placed on the varied riches and possibilities of these five republics. Taken as a whole, they pos-

sess more agricultural and timber wealth than mining potentialities, but they are developing rapidly along all three lines in a way to prove that they have not been appreciated heretofore, either in Europe or in the United States.

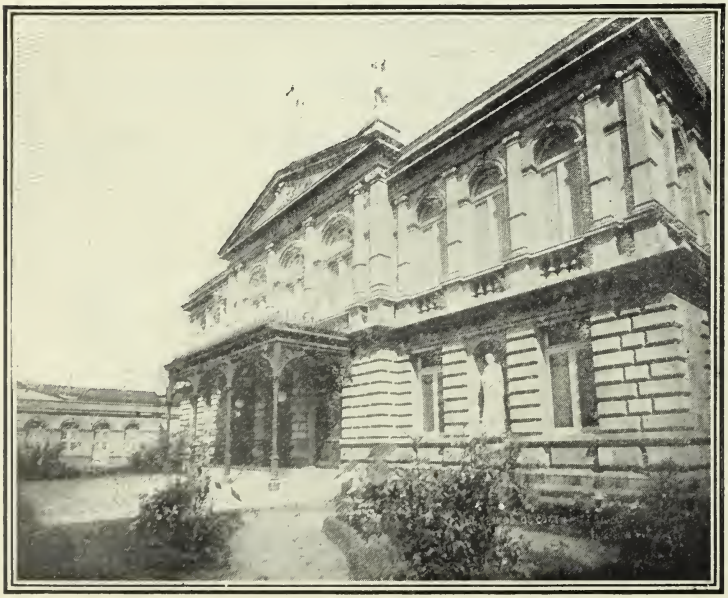
The number of recent disturbances in Central America has given the impression abroad that these nations are always in a state of strife, and hence that commerce and material progress have little to encourage them. A consideration, however, of the figures of their foreign trade with the world at large, and with the United States in particular, demonstrates that despite warlike struggles at frequent intervals they have time and money to do a very fair business with the outside world.

THE CATHEDRAL AT GUATEMALA CITY.

CLIMATIC CHARACTERISTICS OF CENTRAL AMERICA.

People are always asking: What is the climate of Central America; is it not unfavorable to North Americans or to persons accustomed to a temperate climate? Were the entire area of Central America similar to the part along the Caribbean coast, I should be inclined to speak disparagingly of it, but it must be remembered that large sections are located either at such an altitude or in such relation to prevailing winds that the temperature seldom becomes too hot for ordinary comfort, and never too cold. Even in the lower and so-called fever, malarial, and mosquito districts, it is wonderful what a change can be wrought by clearing away the jungle, providing good sewerage and pure water, and generally developing a sanitary environment. Then, the terrors of excessive heat seem to disappear and the tropics become a source of delight.

What has been done at Panama can be duplicated everywhere in Central America if the same methods are employed. There is hardly a depressing, forbidding port of Guatemala, Honduras, Salvador, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica which could not be made healthy and habitable for foreigners if a well-developed plan for sanitation were carried to complete execution. This is sure to come some day, with the result that the whole so-called "Mosquito Coast" and the remainder of the Caribbean shore of Central America will be busy with prosperous commercial *entrepôts*, which, in turn, will be connected by rail-



THE NATIONAL THEATRE OF COSTA RICA AT SAN JOSÉ.

roads with all parts of the hitherto impenetrable jungle, as well as with the mountain capitals and towns. In fact, I look to see, during the next twenty years, a transformation in Central America which will astonish the world and make it difficult to realize that, in 1907, it was commonly regarded as a *terra incognita.*

HOW TO REACH CENTRAL-AMERICAN CITIES.

The query is often propounded to the International Bureau of American Republics: How does a visitor go to the principal cities of Central America, and what are the conditions of travel? The best way to-day to reach Guatemala City, the capital of Guatemala; San Salvador, the capital of Salvador; Tegucigalpa, the capital of Honduras, and Managua, the capital of Nicaragua, is either by the way of Panama and the Pacific or by San Francisco and the Pacific, except that the new rail route across the isthmus of Tehuantepec may presently provide connections that will be quicker than the route *via* San Francisco or Panama. San José, the capital of Costa Rica, has direct rail connections with Port Limon, on the Caribbean shore, and will soon have a through railroad to Punta Arenas on the Pacific Gulf of Nicoya. The port of Guatemala City is the town of San José, from which a railroad runs to the capital. The line from the Caribbean, soon to be completed, begins at Puerto Barrios. Northwestern Guatemala is reached through the ports of Ocos and Champerico, and a railroad extends from the latter place to several important towns of the interior. The principal port of Salvador is Acajutla, from which a railroad carries one, in five hours, to the city of San Salvador. From La Libertad there is a fair mountain road, but it has been little used since the railway was completed.

THE WHITE HOUSE, SAN SALVADOR.

THE BANK OF COSTA RICA.

The capital of Honduras has its port at Amapala, on the Pacific Gulf of Fonseca, and a good macadamized road extends from San Lorenzo to Tegucigalpa, on which automobiles are operated. A railroad is planned and partly constructed to connect Tegucigalpa not only with the Gulf of Fonseca, but also with Puerto Cortez, on the Caribbean Gulf of

Honduras. When these roads will be completed is, however, uncertain. The chief port of Nicaragua is Corinto, on the Pacific side. From this port, a railroad runs to Managua, and thence to Granada, on Lake Nicaragua.

PRECAUTIONS FOR TRAVELERS.

The capital towns of the Central-American republics vary in population, but all provide hotels and clubs that are comfortable. New York and Paris hostelries do not abound, as there is no demand for them, but unless a man is a chronic "kicker" he need not be unhappy in his Central-American surroundings. Whoever goes there should be provided with an abundance of light clothing, such as white duck, brown khaki, or thin flannel. He must guard against the sun in the middle of the day, and should wear, unless he carries an umbrella, a pith hat or some kind of sun helmet. After the sun is well down, the air cools off immediately, and the nights are generally cool. Except in the higher altitudes, a mosquito net is absolutely necessary, and no traveler along the coast or in the low interior should be caught without one. If any time is spent in this section, it is also well to take regular doses of quinine, according to one's capacity or health, in order to guard against malaria. Ordinary care should also be exercised in the kind of food consumed, and even more care in the kind of water that is drunk.

I do not wish to frighten anybody or make it appear that there is any particular danger while traveling in these countries. I desire rather to make a few simple suggestions, which, if followed, will make travel and life there more safe and agreeable. As to myself, I can say that during many years' residence as United States Minister in different tropical countries of the Orient and America, including a year at Panama (before it was made healthy and sanitary through the great work of Colonel Gorgas), I never experienced a day's sickness from any kind of tropical complaint. I exercised common-sense care of myself, and nothing more. To-day, I visit the heart of the tropics with far less hesitation than I do New England in winter.

TRADE, COMMERCE, AND FINANCIAL STATUS.

That this discussion of Central America may contain some exact information about its

ONE OF THE ROOMS IN THE GOVERNMENT PALACE OF HONDURAS, AT TEGUCIGALPA.

SORTING COFFEE, SAN SALVADOR.

trade, commerce, and general business, the latest statistics and figures, prepared in the International Bureau of American Republics, of which the writer is the director, are given in summarized form. The total foreign commerce, exports and imports, of the five republics amounted last year to the considerable total of $56,133,000. Of this, exports were $32,170,000 and imports $23,963,000, or a favorable balance of nearly $10,000,000. The share of the United States in the above trade is interesting to note, because it averaged about half. The total was $26,376,000, of which exports to the United States were $14,992,000, and imports from the United States $11,384,000.

Taking each country in turn for the purpose of providing accurate and specific information, it is noted that the total trade of Guatemala with the world is $15,082,000, of which $6,844,000 are imports and $8,238,000 are exports. Of this, the portion of the United States is $5,582,000, divided as follows: Imports, $2,707,000; exports, $2,875,000. The budget for 1906-07 estimates the revenues of the government at $25,000,000.

Salvador enjoys a foreign commerce of $9,986,000, divided into exports of $5,640,000 and imports of $4,346.000. The share of the United States is $2,580,000, with exports of $1,225,000 and imports of $1,355,000. The annual budget for 1906-07 estimates the national revenues at $8,644,295.

Honduras conducts an external trade with the world of $7,857,000, of which exports are $5,564,000 and imports $2,293,000. The United States' proportion of this trade is valued at $6,322,000, or much the largest part, of which exports to the United States are $4,632,000 and imports therefrom $1,690,000. The last budget places the revenues at $3,043,000. Although the foreign debt is heavy, Honduras has marvelous resources, which, developed, will enable her to meet her obligations.

Nicaragua's foreign commerce reaches a total of $7,128,000, of which $3,926,000 represents exports, and $3,202,000 imports. Of these, the share of the United States is nearly half, as the total is $3,757,000,

with exports at $2,089,000 and imports at $1,668,000. The annual income for government expenses is about $20,000,000. Nicaragua gives every evidence of being on the highway to great material progress, and is offering exceptional opportunities for the investment of capital in both mining and agriculture. Great public improvements are also contemplated that will add much to the prosperity of the country.

Although Costa Rica ranks fourth in area among the Central-American republics, she stands a good second in foreign trade. This amounted, in 1906, to the large sum of $16,000,000, of which the exports were $8,802,000 and imports $7,278,000. The United States shared to the extent of about half, or $8,135,000, with exports and imports, respectively, at $4,171,000 and $3,964,000. The revenue for 1906-'07 is estimated at $3,372,795.

Everybody who visits Costa Rica carries away a good impression and has great confidence in its future. The banana business has grown to such size that it has become a decided source of wealth to the country and people. Mining has not been conducted on a large scale, but considerable mineral wealth is believed to exist in the mountains.

PRINCIPAL PRODUCTS SOLD AND BOUGHT.

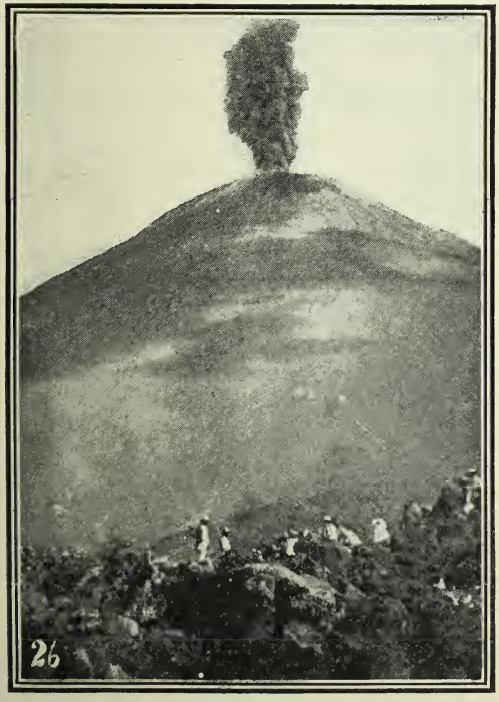
The character of the trade of Central America with the world and with the United States can be best appreciated by noting some of the principal articles which are exported and imported. Central Americans sell abroad coffee, bananas, rubber, cacao, dyewoods, valuable lumber, like mahogany and other cabinet woods, hides and skins, rice, sugar, indigo, balsam, tobacco, and minerals. They buy cotton and woolen cloth, machinery, railway, electric and mining outfits, wheat flour, drugs, and medicines, iron and steel manufactures, sacks for export of coffee and fruit, canned provisions, and a host of lesser articles. The list is long enough to show that there are great opportunities in Central America for the manufacturers and exporters of the United States if they will make vigorous efforts to exploit it along legitimate lines. As this trade will next year reach a total valuation of $60,000,000, it should be carefully investigated by all those interested.

The principal centers of trade and industry in Central America include Guatemala City, which has 96,000 people; Coban, Toonicapan, and Quezaltenango, in Guatemala, with about 25,000 each; Tegucigalpa

MERCED STREET IN GUATEMALA CITY.

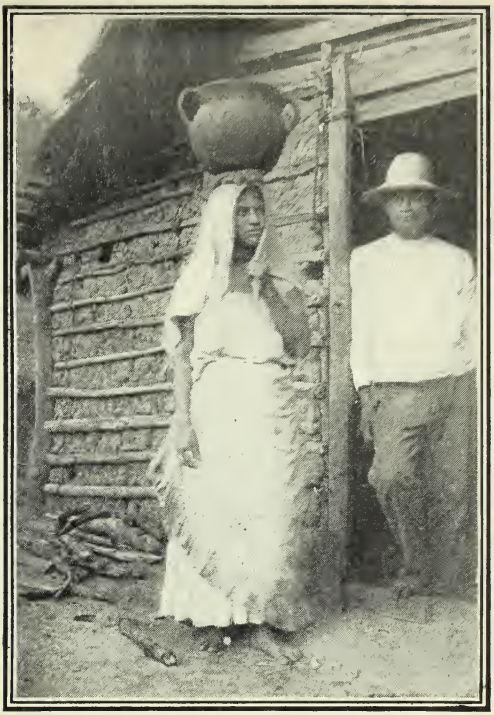
with about 34,000, and Comayagua with 10,000, in Honduras; León with 60,000, Granada with 30,000, and Managua with 25,000, in Nicaragua; San Salvador with 60,000, and Santa Ana with 48,000, in Salvador, and San José with 25,000, Heredia with 10,000, and Limon with 7000, in Costa Rica. Many of these towns are also seats of notable institutions of learning, such as the schools of law and medicine at Guatemala City, the Institute of Jurisprudence and Political Science at Tegucigalpa, the National University at San Salvador, the schools of law, medicine, and pharmacy at Managua and Leon, and the schools of law and medicine in San José.

If any one assumes that because there are occasional revolutions in Central America and the climate is somewhat tropical, there is not a considerable element of highly educated and refined men and women in the chief cities and towns, he labors under great error. A large proportion of the well-to-do people have traveled abroad and send their sons or



IZALCO VOLCANO, SALVADOR.

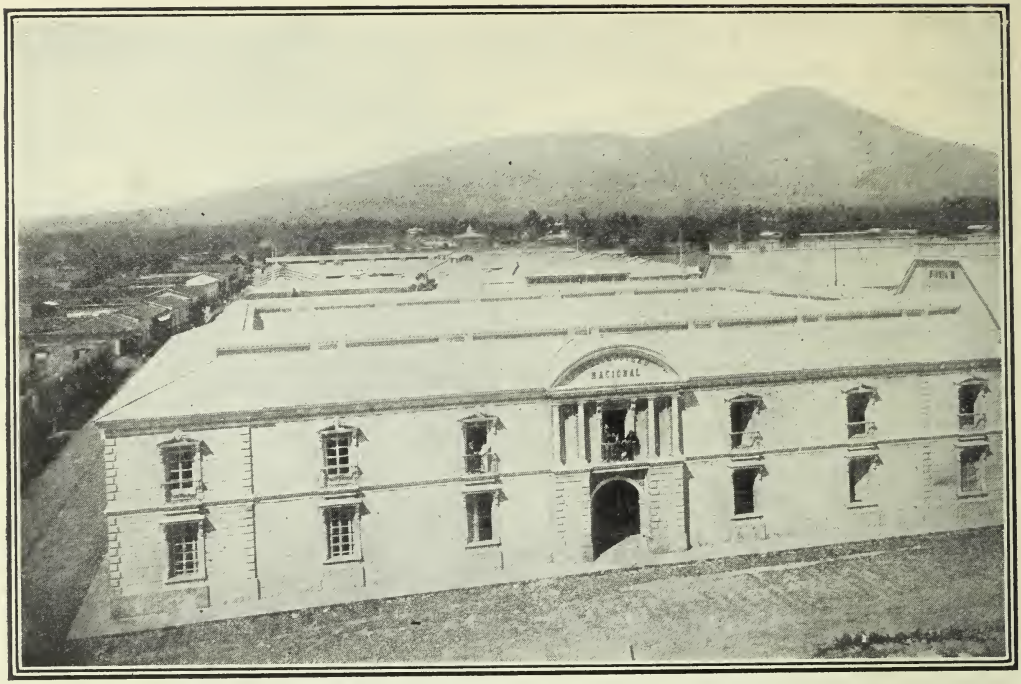
daughters to the United States and Europe for educational advantages in addition to their home schools. Each country has produced writers, historians, poets, novelists, jurists, doctors and surgeons, as well as statesmen, who are well known throughout all Latin America and who are becoming better known in the United States. The society found by the visitor in the Central-American capitals is always more interesting and cultured than he expects to meet before he has acquired familiarity with actual conditions. Guatemala City, for instance, is a remarkable capital, with nearly 100,000 people, which will become a popular point for travelers and tourists from the United States when the Pan-American Railroad or the new line from the Caribbean shore is completed. In fact, Guatemala has a splendid future before it, but the world has only recently begun to appreciate its resources and possibilities. Much might also be said of the conditions and attractions of the other Central-American capitals, like San José, Managua, Tegucigalpa, and San Salvador, but there is not space in this brief article.



NATIVES OF SAN SALVADOR.

BENEFITS OF AN INTERCONTINENTAL RAILWAY.

No matter how many steamship lines may be put in operation between the Pacific, Gulf, and Atlantic ports of the United States and Central America, the principal



THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF SAN SALVADOR.

cities and points of this section of the North-American continent will never be reached rapidly and by large numbers of people until the Pan-American Railway system is constructed from Mexico down through Guatemala, Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica to Panama. The line now reaches practically to the border of Guatemala, and there are no insurmountable difficulties in connecting it with the small systems already in operation, or in course of construction, in these different states. If the movement which has been so strongly urged by ex-Senator Henry G. Davis, of West Virginia, and which has been approved by the different Pan-American Conferences, is carried to a consummation, it will be one of the greatest forward steps to Pan-American unity. In ten years, it should be possible for a traveler to start out from New York and make the journey to each of the Central-American capitals in comfortable Pullman trains.

For 300 years Central America was under Spanish authority, beginning with the invasion of Pedro and Jorge de Alvarado on the north and Gil Gonzales de Avila on the south. The former came down from Mexico just before the latter came up from Panama, taking possession of what is now Costa Rica and Nicaragua. For long years, Central America was known as the Kingdom of Guatemala, with governors appointed by the Spanish Government. After their independence was consummated in the year 1821, and, until 1847, these countries remained as one republic. Since they separated there have been various efforts to unite them again into one nation, but none of these has been completely successful.

THE BUREAU OF THE AMERICAN REPUBLICS.

The International Bureau of the American Republics, in Washington, which has the twofold purpose of developing commerce and trade and of promoting better relations and closer acquaintance among all the nations of the Western Hemisphere, will be glad to answer any inquiries from the readers of the REVIEW OF REVIEWS about the resources, possibilities, and general development of the Central-American republics which may be suggested by this brief description, while the able ministers in Washington and consuls-general in New York City of these countries are always ready to consider legitimate and serious questions from those who may be interested.

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